

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) continued to advocate for increased benefits for our nation's Veterans by cosponsoring and helping pass the Disabled Military Retiree Relief Act of 2009 (HR 2990). The bill, which was approved by the House unanimously, temporarily allows for the concurrent receipt of retirement pay and disability compensation for Veterans with certain disability ratings, while creating a framework to extend benefits to service members with a lower disability rating and lengthen the eligibility period. Eligibility for concurrent payment would start on January 1, 2010 and last until September 30, 2010.

“Our veterans and their families selflessly sacrificed on a day to day basis to protect our country,” said Congressman Sestak. “It is our responsibility to care for those in need when they return from duty. This bill temporarily provides the benefits needed to support those who have served our country while we develop a more permanent solution.”

The challenges faced by disabled retirees with less than 20 years of service had gone unaddressed until Congress acted to include them in the Combat-Related Special Compensation program when the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. Still, there is much more to be done for a group that includes many service members who were on track to serve a full military career, but fell short of 20 years of service because of their disabilities. Many were disabled at younger ages and often with young families, resulting in difficult financial situations.

At this time, disabled Veterans with less than 20 years of service would have their retirement pay reduced based on the amount of disability compensation they receive. With this legislation, many of these men and women will collect their entire earned retirement pay in addition to their disability pay.

This bill temporarily allows service members that have been retired for severe disability to concurrently receive military retired pay from DOD and disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs if they also meet the following criteria:

have less than 20 years of service and have been rated 100 percent disabled,
are 100 percent disabled by reason of individual unemployability, or
are 90 percent disabled.

Additionally, the legislation extends bonuses and special pay to members of the Armed Forces. These benefits are available for enlisted servicemen and women and encourage them to reenlist, remain on active duty, and accept certain special assignments until December 31, 2010.

This bill also contains benefits for federal employees. Federal employees lost all unused sick days at the end of their career. Now employees may accrue credit for unused sick days. Also, in an effort to attract former federal employees to return into federal service, the bill provides an option for them to restore credits towards their retirement.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including as Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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